

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: June 7, 2017

Agenda Item: Horse Creek Complex Conservation Easement (R7)

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Endorsement

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 Min

Background

FWP proposes to purchase a perpetual conservation easement on approximately 15,390 acres of deeded land southwest of Wibaux. Of these acres, 12,189 are currently owned by the landowners; they are negotiating to purchase 3,200 acres, which could potentially be a part of this project. The property transitions from rolling hardwood draws and grasslands on the north, to badlands, and finally to extensive Wyoming big sagebrush grasslands on the south. Glendive Creek and several minor tributaries traverse the property. The ranch provides excellent year-round habitat for mule deer and is within sage-grouse general range. The ranch also supports antelope, sharp-tailed grouse, whitetail deer, occasional elk, and a diversity of nongame and sagebrush obligate species. A conservation easement would protect healthy blocks of riparian and sagebrush habitats from conversion to other cover types, benefitting wildlife and agriculture, while also increasing public hunting and recreational opportunities.

FWP is collaborating with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service to potentially partner on funding for this proposed conservation easement.

Public Involvement Process & Results

FWP has not sought any public comment at this time. Upon endorsement from the Commission, FWP would conduct appropriate analysis, public review processes, and negotiations.

Alternatives and Analysis

Proposed Action: Purchase the 15,390-acre Horse Creek Complex Conservation Easement. FWP in cooperation with the landowner would develop a rest-rotation grazing system and riparian management to improve wildlife habitat while also securing permanent public access.

No Action alternative: FWP would forgo the opportunity to conserve and enhance valuable wildlife habitats with a willing private land partner. There would be no guarantee of public access to the property.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

To conserve the high resource values and public recreation opportunities on this land, FWP recommends endorsement by the Fish & Wildlife Commission, allowing FWP to proceed with further development of this opportunity.

Proposed Motion

I move the Fish & Wildlife Commission endorse the Horse Creek Complex conservation easement project, allowing FWP to continue negotiations and to conduct analysis and associated public review.